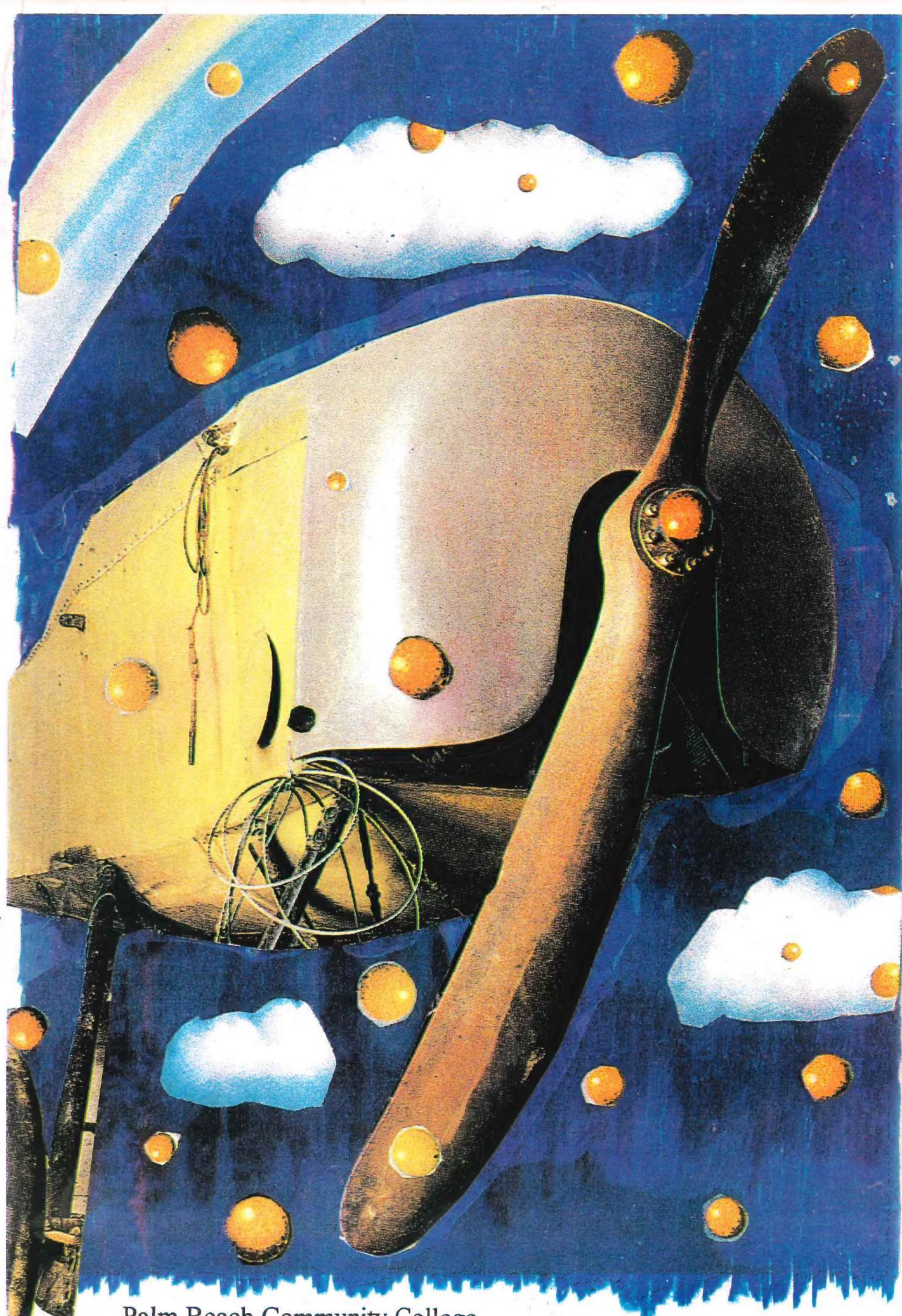


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Palm Beach Community College

APOLLO'S LUTE

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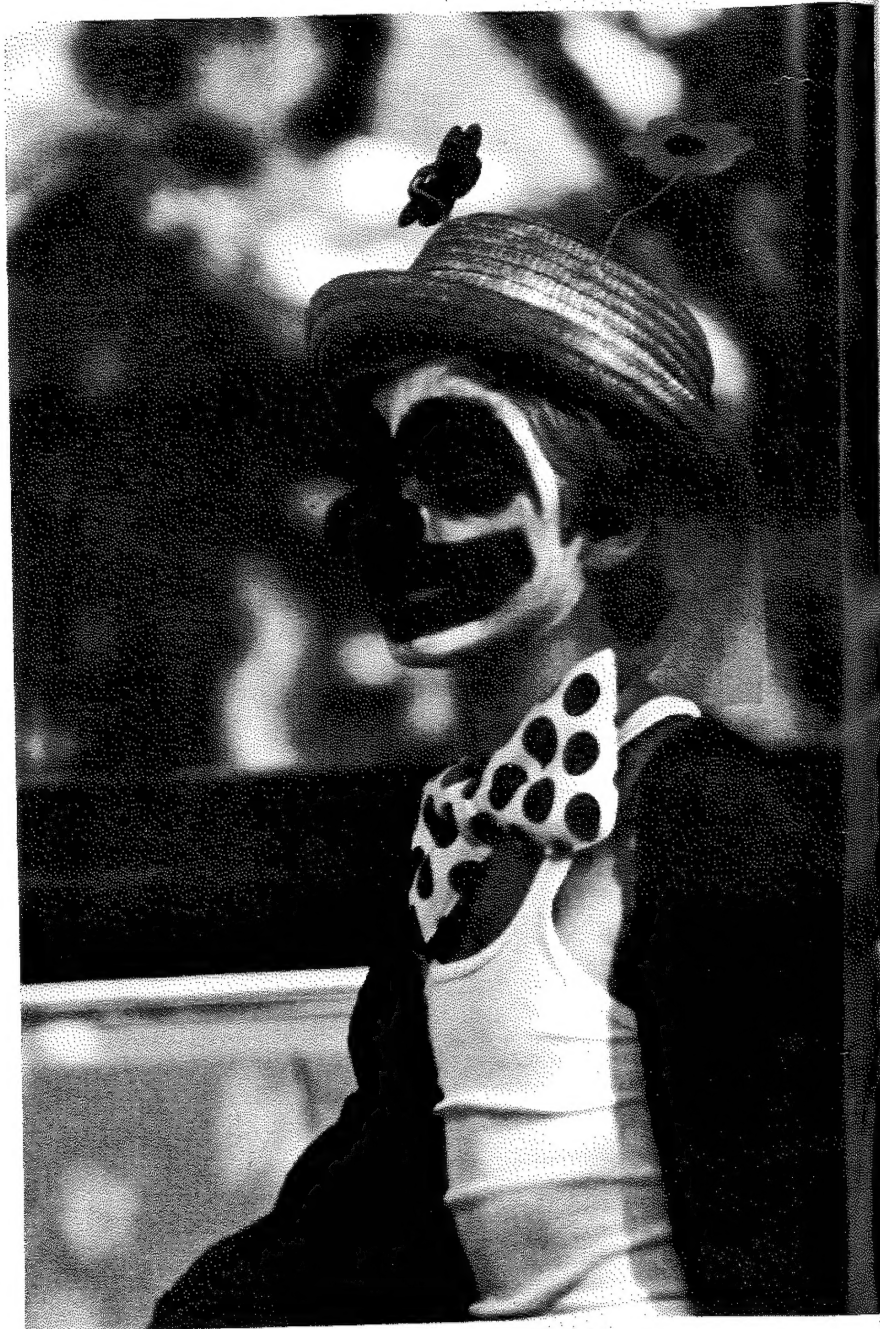
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SPECIAL THANKS

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Palm Beach Community College

THE HIP PHYSICISTS

You're the ends
of a crescent moon.
The parts
that get worn off first.
But here you are.
You need to be held
just right.

I love how you seem
to be part of
something
much bigger than me.

The hip physicists
would call you
"Subatomic fine."

But do they know?
Do they
understand?
It's you!
You
curve beautifully
inside and out.
When we talk
(not enough)
or when I see you
walking,
I see a thousand
crescent moons.
That's
your defining curve.
Light rools off you
just
like
that.

Broken Haiku

(Appropriate for Goodbyes)

Fight the wind.
Hate it.
Hold yourself tight
because I can't.
Tight
like
a dandelion.

How You Walk

A heron has no
wasted geometry.
And this particular heron
was walking
the way
you live.
Sneaking conspicuously,
Tip-toeing, practically.

You've got to trust me.
Dreams don't sneak up on me.
Angels don't sneak up on me.

And you didn't.
It's absurd that this heron
was walking so gently across the street.
It was that perfectly
beautiful.

Paul Gilberry

MY SHOPPING SPREE

Yesterday I bought a small bag of words
in the produce section of my local Publix market- -
between the Artichokes and Zucchini.

It's not easy picking out the right words
from the large selection on display.

I try to select only those that
look good and ripe,
smell fresh and not rancid,
and above all, keep away from those
that seem to be dried out and limp.
They remind me of last night's leftovers.

Since the cost of words is so high
that you'd think they were imported caviar,
I generally can't afford more than a quarter pound,
which is barely enough for a haiku, double spaced.

When they're on sale, or double coupons,
I splurge and buy a half pound for an essay,
or a full pound for a short story.

Someday, when I hear from Publishers Clearing House
or Ed McMann and Dick Clark,
I'm going to buy as many bushels as it could take
to dash off that novel I've been born to write.

Until then, I'll just keep buying quarter pounds
Whenever I can afford to write a poem but,
no way would I buy words in the frozen food section- -
they're packed so tight I can't tell one word from another
and, by the time they're defrosted,
I forget what it is I want to do with them.

Darn it, my bag is empty!! I'm at a loss for words
.....and that's the last word.

Ben Altman



I Want To Be a Raindrop

It was a fitting day for her cremation. The sky loomed overhead so close to the earth, with heavy, charcoal-colored clouds, looking like big, sad eyes, swollen with tears. But there wasn't a drop of rain during her ceremony. No one even cried. All the tears of the crowd had been spent these last few weeks when they all knew she would die. They now formed a river and were gone downstream, lost in some larger body of water.

She left the note that day, and then just took the pills and slept. Her friend who found her rushed her to St. Mary's and they hooked her up to all sorts of tubes, but the brain was gone. Organs were passed out to waiting bodies. They were healthy, 35 yr. old organs, still alive and able to give life to dying bodies. . . Such irony.

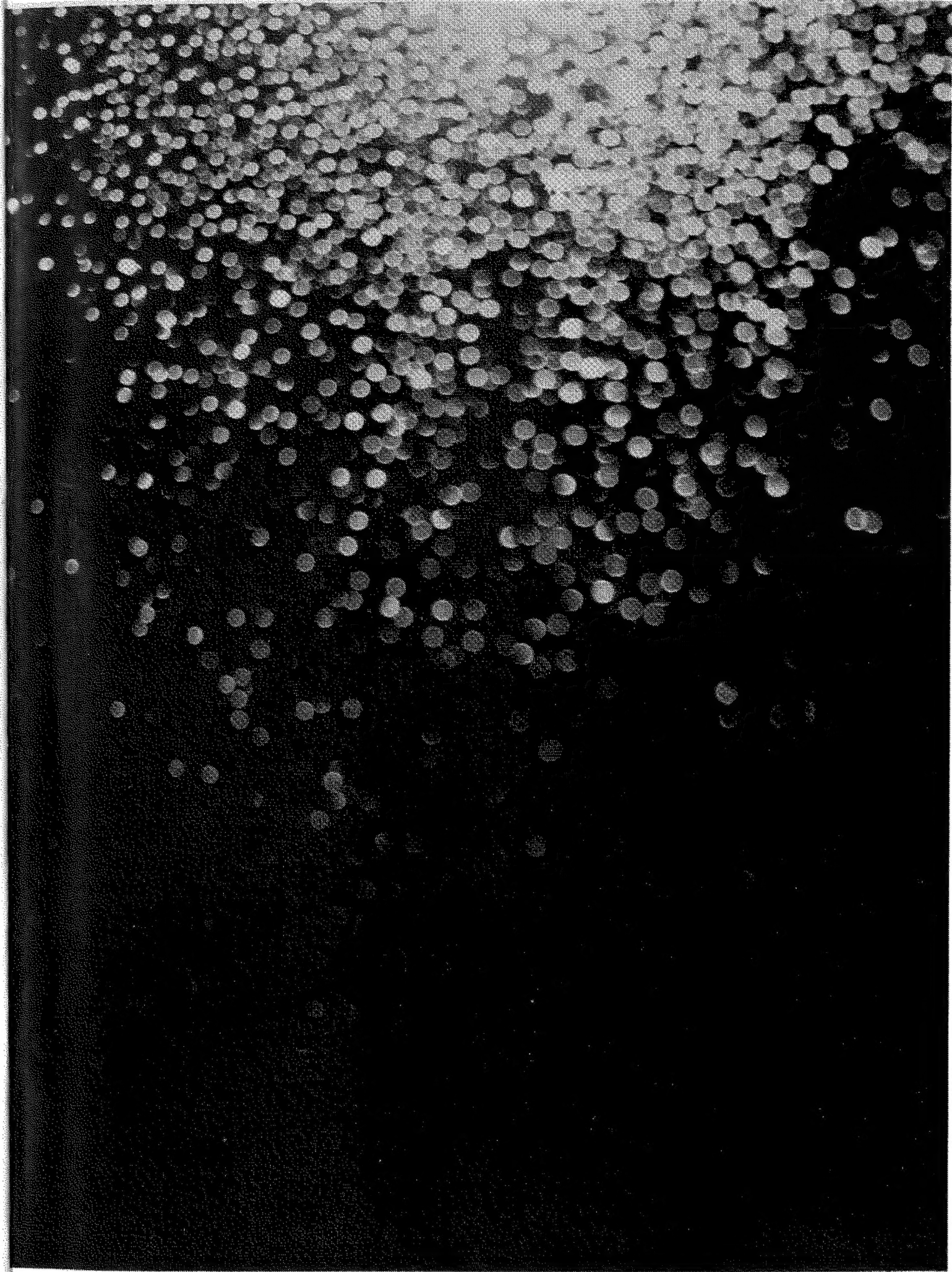
Now the shell of her body was being cremated. Like some ancient indian sacrifice, the fire was lit and the flames consumed the flesh and within minutes, there were ashes.

She wouldn't have wanted to be put on a shelf. No ornate jar would contain her spirit. . . Or even attempt to. "Throw me recklessly over the ocean, the Atlantic please." She really wrote that in her note. She was always so organized.

The seas were churning that day as we twenty people huddled in the sailboat. We could hardly get out the inlet. The ocean was fighting us, reminding us that it wasn't time for our friend to go. When her friend Ann whom she had specified in her note as the one to scatter her ashes opened the jar, the sun came out. . . suddenly and only for a moment. Those ashes looked like jewels on ice, they were so bright.

After we had returned from the ocean, the skies opened up and it began to rain. How did she know that was going to happen? In her note, she had said she wanted to evaporate from the ocean that very day and become a raindrop. As we all stood there in the downpour, we knew that she was all over us. . . still nurturing us and making us grow. We couldn't tell after a while if we were crying, or, if it was just the rain. She was a raindrop.

By C. Davis



TRIPPING ON THE GREEN SHELVES

THEY ARE IN MY ROOM
THREE OF THEM
VERTICALLY LINED UP
DARK GREEN
LIKE SPINACH

THEY SCARE ME
MAYBE THAT IS WHY THERE IS NOTHING ON THEM
I HAVE PLENTY OF BOOKS
BUT "NEVER" WILL I LET THEM BEFRIEND THE SHELVES

BOOKSHELVES ARE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE PATHETICALLY NORMAL
THEY HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN BUY SHELVES FOR ALL THE BOOKS THEY DON'T READ
I WONDER HOW MUCH MY FATHER PAID FOR THOSE SHELVES?
TWENTY DOLLARS...
A CARTON OF CIGARETTES...
I NEED A DRAG.

SEE, THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE ME.
WE ARE PATHETICALLY PATHETIC.
NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN SIT HERE AND TRIP OUT ON BOOKSHELVES
AND ESTIMATE THEIR VALUE IN CIGARETTES
(CRYSTAL
NOW I AM TEMPTED
SMORTING LINES OFF THOSE BOOKSHELVES WOULD GIVE ME A RUSH
SOMETIMES I AM EVEN TEMPTED TO LIVE LIKE A HUMAN BEING
MY BOOKS WOULD BE ON THE SATANIC SHELVES
THE SHELVES WOULD NOT SCARE ME
ALTHOUGH I BET THIS POEM WOULD

WHAT ABOUT YOU ?

ARE YOU SCARED?

SARAH RAIN STARR



Decima Campesina

for my Father

Memories of moist Cuban earth
Cling to your dark, galloping soul,
Lush with heat & hair, like a foal
Clinging to mother's breast at birth.
Long ago you abandoned hearth
And field for sweet cantatas full
Of New York and a thimble
Of Paris. But they were tin lies
That have since made tires of your eyes
And of your life, a twice paid toll.

You plant tufts of garlic and rose
In a Brooklyn lot, clearing vials
And wrappers first. You wait meanwhile
For clouds to pass, ready with hose
To shear off the salted rain. You chose
This life for me as well: This rough
Plot's gnashing teeth, and monstrous puffs
Of ego. Why bemoan this place?
Stripped of music & light & grace,
Your memory is music enough.

By E.J. Vega





Joan of Arc

Creeping inferno of her beetle sword
caressing the wings of crippled angels
insane laughter of celestial candles
evaporating in her cold stare,
memories of bleeding innocence
echoes her hollow thoughts
pleading puppets with drooling eyes
await the inevitable blow,
bellowing king who once roared the domain
knelt in humble embrace,
the thirsty maiden raises her scattered brow
to mate the trembling thrown,
tired shepherds in dispersed flocks
celebrate the freedom shore,
jaded cross in howling crescent
signals the coming of a devil's bride,
hail to the kingdom of anti-christ
reverberated the shepherd abyss,
the goddess who once carried the pawns
dangles with the cat witches,
praises of her shrieking spells inoculate the thin pages
but the mourn of her treason
overshadows the scriptures text.

Iftikhar M. Memon
third place poetry contest



Would I welcome judgement to be passed upon me

Would I welcome judgement to be passed upon me
up to the throat and down the passageways of err

Could I,
accept,

thrashes of the tongue in re
of all of the fumbles, mindless bankrupt fair

Pointed is the finger of one quick to pass
judgement upon others

Who am I,
that I can justify so haughty heights
to declare jury and judge of sisters and brothers

Perhaps mirrors should reflect upon ourselves
when of others so easily we frame opinions
perceptions edges so rigidly
would not, in measures tantamount
bear up under our own prejudice

easily we bestow graces and praise
onto those whom we receive the alike
under scrutiny one's hypocrisy reflects
sufficient enough shame and abhorrence-
-towards ourselves
to be plenty enough fuel for the mire
we so easily inflict upon foes

more strenuous the endeavor to keep fingers in fist
when ourselves the object of reproach
easily the tongue chastises our adversaries whom
contemptuously ridicule or encroach
upon our haughty heights

to aspire to be as the One
accepting lashings as well as pride
strength being born of the former
the latter being born of conceit

Is it not arrogant in of itself to aspire
to fashion one's thoughts around His
why are the answers the simplest of simple
so fashioned and difficult to live?

Had i a coin for the faults I have found
in others
and none of my own
I would be the richest
and poorest around
to profess at the foot of His throne

will I, Can I
ever change for better
with adversity a surety promised
so comfortable and easy the present practices
"creatures of habit we are"
would take mountains of mercy
and the patience of Job
to train my one cheek how to turn

with this comes the hope
in that I am aware
of the afflictions that plague my heart
and for he who is all and know all within us
'tis the simplest lesson of simple to learn
that of ourselves we are predators
and of ourselves we are prey
we build up as well as tear down
and whatever so consumes one the most
ultimately fashions ones' crown

Christina G. Poore
first place poetry contest



kava kava

My mother has a husband
Not my father, just her husband
He is sleeping on the couch
He is snoring
He wakes up
He goes to bed
My mother wakes up
She walks out to the couch
And
Falls asleep
You see
Couches are evil
My mother and father had an orange couch.....
If I had a husband I would throw away my couch
Right out the window

SMASH

Because I am smart and I know...
The truth about couches
If you know anybody who is getting married
PLEASE do not buy them a couch

Thank you

Sarah Rain Starr

LAYLA

I wanted this
to be my "Layla."
I wanted you
to be my Layla.

We hurt each other less than those
around us.
Is that what it's all about?
We pinch and prod and play
and hurt each other,
but not as bad as the ones we love.
Or the ones who love us.
Love?

I was just with you, but I miss you.
It's like that all the time.
I love every second
I'm with you,
and they're all different.
I worship time now.
Even as it passes.
Time with you.
Love?
I found it.
Love?

I have a great idea for a story about us.
But it doesn't end.
Not like this.
It ends.
It has to.
It's not writing itself anymore.
It was and it was and it was.
But now it has stopped.
Do I let it end itself like this??

You are the only person I ever tried to
impress.
I did, didn't I?
I thought so,
but it was sort of like a game,
wasn't it?
Where I say what I feel
and you say what you feel,
but we might as well be yelling
because these paths are parallel.

We're not together.
We're not together.
We're not together.
Yes I was honest,
and yes, we're close.
But not close enough.
Gravity?
Inertia?

I hate that there's some sort of physics
to this.
Like some sort of Pynchon book.
Like chaos theory
can tell me
why we're alone.
We are.
Alone.
I am.
Keep yelling.
Tell me I can do it,
because I never have before.
I needed you,
but now it's different.
Alone.

Not again? Ha!
I always have been.
You're a mirage.
I created you.
I made you kill me.
That's a lie.
They both are.
You created yourself
and I'm still alive.
You couldn't kill me.
You're just you and
I love you.
You couldn't kill me.
Not even out of pity.
I can't do it alone.
What?

This is the part where I fire off several
rapid fire metaphors.
You're a sunset or
you're the moon
or whatever.
And you are, but...
We don't get to see sunsets.
You're the girl
who told me about

how there was a faint tingle
on her cheek
and it felt like rain.
That was you.
You're the girl that believes in me.
But I want to be your religion
because you're mine.

Yes I think you believe in me,
and yes I wish we were just friends.
We are.
Aren't we?
We always have been.
But my friends don't make me
feel new.
They make me feel old
and odd.
I've never had a friend
like you.
An anything like you.
You.

You.

I wish there was some noise right
Rain against my window.
Or wind.
Or you.
I wish I wasn't writing this.
William William Williams, you said
and he says
there's a waterfall in Paterson.
That's how I feel.
I hear a waterfall all the time.
Make some noise.
Whisper to me
so I can ask you what you said.
Whisper to me.

What did you say, Layla?
Wwhat did you say?
Don't tell me.
Don't
ever
tell
me.

Tell me.

Paul Gilberry
first place poetry contest



CHARACTER STUDY : A Revised Version

Rolling and bunching, piled high it covered the neighborhood, hardening the trees and kissing the windows. For many, this was a hesitant morning; standing entranced at the delicate beauty outside their homes. They waited with held breath until exploding out of doors; children fell to their knees in the crunchy drifts, spreading their arms and collapsing into disorderly angels. The spell broken, mothers and fathers ran outside draping their little ones in scarves and gloves and pulled them once more inside for a hot breakfast.

Matthew already finished breakfast, stepped out into the wintery silence and began the long walk to the bus stop. He was in no great hurry; ninth grade held no huge attraction for him. Before long, he was leaning against a lamp post ignoring the ten people rushing around him, throwing snowballs and yelling at each other.

In the distance, what had been just a pink hat bobbing above the tall mounds of snow melted into the form of a girl, head down and hands in pockets, Marianne. Matthew watched her approach with sympathy; she tried her best to be invisible. And, as always happens to those poor souls desperate to go unnoticed, Marianne slipped and fell on a patch of ice.

Laughter broke out just as the bus arrived, screeching open its heavy door. Marianne would have to run now to make the bus. But Matthew knew as he stepped heavily into the bus, that Marianne would not run. And when the bus jerked into motion, Matthew could see out his window the form of Marianne once more retreating into the distance.

Breaking through the morning fog of sleepy brains, the bell's shrill scream created a ripple of movement across the classroom. Chairs were overturned by swinging back packs, filled with purple flavored notes, tattooed with hearts and secret code words. The floor cracked and split as ratty sneakers thundered over abandoned pencils and powder compacts. The teacher escaped through the heavy door first, cigarette in hand.

Amongst the stragglers, one girl sat furiously shoving books into her canvas bag. The girl's face contorted as she inwardly cursed herself for her slowness. Her frustrated movements didn't go unnoticed. Matthew had long since familiarized himself with her routine.

He could replay it exactly in his mind. At exactly five minutes to nine, Marianne would silently fold her notebook shut. Then she would pause momentarily, fixing the teacher with attentive eyes. Next, she would poke her pen and pencil into her purse and slip one arm through her off-white canvas bag. With two minutes remaining, she would wrap one ankle around the front leg of her metal chair and place her left hand under the cover of her brown-covered

textbook. He noticed that she made no marks on the cover, no doodles or math equations. Then she would wait, tense and quivering, for the bell to sound. Her narrowed eyes widened as the bell rang. While the others were shoving their books into their packs, she would lurch from her desk. Pushing off with the foot she'd turned toward the isle, she would slap her book shut under her palm, tuck it under one arm, swing her bag fully onto her shoulder, and head for the door. Sometimes, Matthew would be right behind her. He had seen the relief in her rigid features as soon as both shoes were padding down the hall. He could feel her anxiousness ease, but she never smiled. Head down, she hurried down the hallway at a pace that shook Matthew's breath ragged. She usually lost him in the crowd. This was her goal always, to become just another moving body in the clumsy masses.

But not today. Her mind had slipped into the realm of day dreams. Her eyes had glazed over and her lips relaxed into a tiny smile. Where was she, he wondered. Was she thin and lovely? Did her hair fall shining around a face that was golden and clear? Maybe in her dreams, she was surrounded by friends and admirers. No, more likely she was alone. Marianne seemed more likely to seek privacy.

Matthew had begun to notice her a few weeks earlier. He noticed because he didn't notice. She was as near invisible as a person could be. He'd seen her at the bus stop, but hadn't even recognized her as a person in his class. She had as much presence as the desks and tables. She was a second period fixture. Being an avid reader, Matthew felt that he had developed amazing empathic skills. He could see tragic characters from classic novel built into her face. Her patheticness was of such a degree that it was almost poetic.

And now, here she was before him, animated with fear. She moved quickly, but not quickly enough. Three boys intercepted her just before the doorway. They were laughing even before they began, sure of their victory. Marianne feigned ignorance and tried to walk through them. They closed together. She was out of luck this time. Matthew saw how longingly her eyes carressed the door frame. She was but inches from freedom.

"Where do ya think you're going?" The tall one with the long blonde hair shoved his face close to hers. Her eyes focused on a spot behind him. Matthew could almost feel the tall boy's hot breath against her cheek.

"Hey, why you wearing lipstick? Think anybody'd wanna kiss you?" This came from one of the others. He could barely hold his laughter back. He couldn't believe how funny he was, how much he was impressing his friends. What does it matter that her eyes were straining with

tears? She was a nobody. Just some ugly freak who didn't talk.

Matthew could see worlds changing in her eyes, in the tightening of her lips, in the tenseness between her eyebrows. He could feel her questioning every god she'd ever known why this was happening to her. Why couldn't she have just reached the hall?? He could taste the saltiness of the tears that would glide over her lips when she was alone. Her heartbeat pounded fast in his ears; he could feel the cracking of something very deep inside her.

Her head jerked up and her eyes met his squarely. Those eyes burned with exquisite fire of pride resurrected from humiliation. She didn't move, but her energy shifted. He felt her much closer to him. His face was a mirror of compassion and sympathy, and she hated him for it. This feeling came from her like a blast of heat.

"What're you looking at?"

His whole philosophy of life tumbled out of focus in that one moment. Her voice had been harsh, tinged with the moistness of pain. She kept him pinned with her eyes. He thought of how he had seen her caught like this so many times but never made a move to stop it. He'd always just been watching and waiting for the inevitable, the breaking point. Suddenly, he realized he was very much a part of her internal struggle. The other boys continued their attack, desperate to reclaim her attention. Their taunts grew meaner, vicious beyond what was ever intended. But she wasn't looking; she heard none of this. And Matthew could no longer feel anything beyond what those burning eyes would allow.

He tried to think. Had he been wrong? He had felt her fear. He had sensed her internal destruction. He could see in his mind's eyes how her soul was shredding, how her knees were buckling under the pressure of too much pain. But was this true?

She stepped to him quickly. He had the sinking feeling she could hear his thoughts. When she spoke again, there was no trace of the vulnerability she had shown before. Her voice was strong and hot. "I won't break for you."

And then, as the distracted bullies spread apart, she fled through the doorway and was gone.

Matthew slumped into the nearest chair. He felt so heavy suddenly. People milled around him, but he didn't notice.

Kelly Fitch

David

In a small forgotten area of London's East End, on a typically misty morning, David awoke to the sound of someone in tears. It was cold and damp, but then he wasn't wearing much. He opened gritty eyelids and peered dazedly around him, trying to locate that which had disturbed his rest. Past the rosebushes, now seasonally bare, he looked toward the knot garden. Nothing there. Still shaking off his sleep, his eyes lit on something huddled against one of the statues lining the lover's path. He couldn't tell right away what it was, but the sound seemed to come from there.

Maybe I need my eyes checked he thought, and stifled a smile. He blinked rapidly and managed to focus more clearly, seeing a petite shape all in nondescript gray; at least his original perception had been on target. The voice sounded feminine - besides, David had never seen a man willing to cry in public, except actors, no matter how the place was secluded. She looked miserable, and David found himself wanting to help her. What was she doing here?

Feeling as if he hadn't spoken in decades, David attempted to clear his throat. The resulting sound was merely a grating whisper, a single footstep on gravel. She didn't notice. He tried again, and was more successful. She stilled, wiping one long sleeve roughly across her face. As she raised red and swollen eyes, David winced in sympathetic pain. There was nothing distinguishable about her face; she was thin and pale.

David recalled hearing an old blues song; about 'two cherries in a glass of buttermilk'. Her eyes were that song. Ages weren't something that David was concerned with. He didn't consider himself to be older or wiser, but neither was he a child. He wasn't sure he'd ever been a child. She looked to be about twenty, past school age anyway, and David estimated that they were close in age. She looked almost familiar to him, and David stared at her, trying to see past the swollen face and unflattering outfit. She'd walked here before, he was sure of it. Always alone, if his memory served, and she usually stuck to the formally laid gardens.

The wool greatcoat was cut in a man's style, at least forty years old and equally too big. It wrapped around her, almost twice fully, swathing her from throat to calf. Her feet were long and narrow - kind of like the rest of her - and encased in black granny boots; worn out across the toes. She looked disconsolate.

She began to speak and David marvelled at the silky fluidity of her voice, like water spilling over rocks. She wasn't beautiful, but her voice was. "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts. Or something like that." She paused. "But what happens when the show must go on, and the player finds that they have no

desire

or even talent for the stage? What if they need something else? Why can't anyone understand?" Tears rolled slowly down soft, alabaster cheeks.

"No-one understands. I don't want this life. Oh, William. This can't be what you intended. They can't know what I want because I don't even know what I want." She sighed, and David was intrigued. She seemed to echo how he often felt, and besides, she was entertaining. Against his own better judgement, he wanted to take part in this conversation. He knew better, course, But...

"Who's William?"

"Shakespeare, of course," she answered without hesitation, to David's delight. Oh, he was definitely going to hear about this later...

"Think, Sophy. Think positively, think hard. Visualize the situation. Everything will work out because you can make it do so." She chanted to herself. She rubbed her eyes tiredly. "I HATE fairy tales."

"Why?"

"Because without Cinderella, my family wouldn't believe that scullery maids can turn into princesses, and if not for that bloody bird, no-one would expect this ugly duckling to turn into a swan." She took a deep breath. "By the way, who said that?" David braced himself in preparation. Well, she seemed friendly enough.

"I did." David didn't wave, but he did move slightly, attracting her attention. "Over here."

"Oh." She took a closer look. "But you're..."

David nodded. "Yes"

"Oh." That seemed to go well, David thought cautiously. At least she wasn't running away screaming about dirty young men hiding in the shrubbery. Yet. She looked curious.

"Aren't you cold?" she asked. "It is October."

David pondered this. Maybe she was taking this too well. "A bit, I s'pose. But I'm used to it."

She nodded wisely. "Spend alot of time out here, do you?"

"Well, yes." Shouldn't that have been obvious? "Would I look like this if I ever went inside?"

She shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know you."

"I won't do anything to hurt you," David hastened to reassure her. ", if you wanted to hang about and talk."

She looked surprised. "D'y'know, I hadn't even thought of that? I s'pose I should've. This is the 1990's after all. Underdressed men usually have something perverse in mind."

"Do you always spend time in conversation with underdressed men?" David asked, fascinated.

"I don't spend time in conversation. with anyone, really. Nobody seems to know what to do with me, what to say to me. But I am from a theatre family," she said, "so half of the men I know walk around half dressed and! wearing makeup."

David laughed. No wonder she was so calm about him.

"I'm David, by the way." he offered in intro-

duction.

She looked him up and down and started to giggle. "Of course you are," she sputtered, and held out one hand to him. David stared at it for a moment before reaching out and shaking it tentatively. No-one had ever offered him a handshake before. He was beginning to enjoy this girl's company.

"I'm Sophie Tucker," she told him.

"Sophie Tucker?" he asked incredulously. "As in...?"

"Yes," she answered, stopping him. "The famous, bawdy heroine of vaudeville theatre. Everything that I am not, by the way. It's my father's fault. I told you: theatre family. There're six of us all together, three of each, and my dad got to name all of us after a legend. By the time I was born, Mum had had enough and told him this was it. With a last name like Tucker, he just had to have a Sophie, didn't he?" She made a face. "Compared to the others, I got off easy. Have a go at these, then - John middle initial G, Lee middle initial B, Sarah R, Nell H and Mick R. What do you think?"

David thought briefly. "Almost all nicknames. I'd say Gielgud, Bernhardt, mmmm, Nell would be short for Helen, so Hayes?, then Mick would have to be Michael so Redgrave. But Lee?" He shook his head.

Sophie grinned. "His Christian name is Lionel."

"Ohhhh. Well, then, he's a Barrymore. Can't have a group of theatre legends without one."

Sophie nodded, pleased. "You're quite good. Not many get them that quickly."

David looked down, almost blushing. That was unusual; modesty wasn't his strong point.

"Well, I have alot of free time," he explained. "And there isn't anything to do with it except listen to conversations, and try to learn all that I can. I can always pick up theatre chat around here."

"Mmmmm. Logical." Sophy said, wrapping her arms around her knees. "Has anyone ever told you that you could use a really good sun-block and moisturizer?"

David gave her a sour look, and she laughed. She didn't seem to be as distressed, he thought, and he found that he was disappointed when she looked at her watch and said that she had probably better get going. He didn't get much of either conversation or company, and the moments when he did seemed to make the rest of his life more lonely. He hadn't met someone like Sophie Tucker in ages...no, not ever.

"I really have to fly." She said, getting up.

"Really?" he asked wistfully.

"'Fraid so. I promised my father I'd help out at rehearsals today. If I don't show, I'll hear about it, believe me. If I'm late, I'll get a lecture on the meaning of professionalism, and that is something I can't stomach., not today."

She gathered herself together. "How terrible do I look? Be honest."

"Not nearly as swollen as you were." David told her, "but still noticeably red .."

"Drat." Sophie sighed. "I s'pose I'll have to explain that, too. Ta, David. S'been nice talking to you."

"Sophie, can I ask you something?"

She turned back, looking at him quizzically

"Course you can, love."

"What's it like out there, in your world?"

She took a deep breath. "Ooh. You save the complicated, ones for last don't you?" She looked down at her feet, frowning. "Tell you what, I'll come again tomorrow morning and we can have a nice long talk. 'Got T really, really have to run right now, and it's a complicated question."

David nodded slowly. Under any other circumstances, with any other person, he would doubt them. But something in Sophie Tucker echoed honesty, and he simply knew that he would see her the next day. He nodded, once and firmly. "Allright."

He couldn't have explained the feeling even if he'd had to. Maybe it was because her sadness had resembled something deep inside himself.

"She won't be back." a phantom voice whispered into his ear as he watched Sophie Tucker walk away down the hedgepath. He smiled.

"Yes, she will." he answered softly. He knew it was Luke, the naysayer, and he knew that Luke would not deign to stay around to argue his declaration. Nor he'd take up his chosen place and stay there until the sun went down. David wondered absently how long his friend had been listening. Oh, well. Let him be negative. David would look forward to the next day.

The mist burned away by midday, and David delighted in the feel of the Indian summer sunshine on his body. It made standing still for so long bearable, even pleasant. In the course of the day, he listened to a few new plays being read (only one of which was any good), and he watched the rehearsals. he also heard a debate on the subject of humanism versus progress, and saw both parties at a chess game cheat shamelessly. He didn't pay attention to the romantic conversations. In his experience, those relationships rarely, if ever, lasted. Give him a good, intelligent friendship any day. David had a quick, lively mind - he craved challenge and new experiences. Maybe that's what he saw in Sophie. He had friends, of a sort, the same ones he'd been aware of his entire life, who were to all intents and purposes his family. The only family, friends or counselors that he'd ever been exposed to. But sometimes he saw them in a different light, as cautious, too cautious, wary of the very things he desired most. He was different from them, too...

The night was crisp, a blue velvet sky cradling the harvest moon, gold enough to be a Spanish doubloon. David breathed in appreciatively.

The air was scented, full of the fragrance of the herbs that grew on the footpaths, crushed by the day's pedestrians. Used to the nights, David wandered over the park at will, blending in with the scenery whenever people walked by.

"Hallows Eve in a few weeks." Luke said quietly from behind him. They stood in the shadows cast by the heavy iron gates, watching London

at night. Luke was thoughtful, as he always was. David sometimes wished that Luke's inner calm could be shaken, but as soon as he thought it

he regretted it. Luke had always been good to David, the closest thing he'd had to a father. His ideas had helped David to learn, to listen and to think for himself. Unfortunately, that was where their differences began.

"It'll be a mess to clean up, again." David answered, making a face. "Every year it gets worse."

"It isn't the cleanup that disturbs me, David" Luke said. David bracer! himself. He knew where this was going.

"It's THEM." Luke continued. "They get worse every year, more violent, more destructive. They act so proud of their civilization, but in reality they have very little to recommend them. Even you should be able to admit that, David. Vicious, all of them."

"Not all of them." David said wearily.

"Well, then the vast majority of them are worthless. You have to be more careful, David. You go on acting, like they are you 'best friends,

like they'll never hurt you. One of these children you whisper to is going to tell his mother, or you'll speak to the wrong person at the wrong time and you'll end up as a science experiment, mark my words. If not for yourself, then think of the rest of us. Stop talking to them. Stop trying to help them. Stop trying to make friends with them."

"I can't do that, Luke. I like them. I learn things from them that fascinate me. It isn't enough for me to stay in one place and try to be invisible anymore. I want more...I NEED more!"

"Then at least promise me that you will be more careful, David."

Luke asked, a worried edge to his voice.

"Please, David. Try a little harder."

David was shaking his head, but he knew he'd say the words that Luke needed him to say. If only to get him off this subject.

"Fine, sure, Luke. Whatever you say. But you know that this is one subject where we are bound to disagree."

Luke looked at David steadily. "Try to believe that I know what I speak of. It's for your own good." With that, Luke walked off, leaving David to ponder his words.

"For my own good?" David thought savagely. "What does my good have to do with living this kind of life? Luke and the others are all so frightened of being noticed that they've forgotten how to be alive. Nothing excites them anymore. Nothing moves them. They don't care anymore. I can't let that happen to me. Why can't they understand that?"

They were stagnant, that was the word. Still and, unmoving to the point of waste. It was such a shame that Luke wouldn't take part in any of the conversations that David had. He knew so much. And Luke could be fun, too. He used to appreciate some of David's better efforts. Like the time he'd spent an entire night in a philosophical discussion with an old man who had consumed more than his capacity of alcohol. Luke had laughed through most of the conversation.

"I guess he thinks that it's allright as long as the person in question isn't likely to remember what happened." David thought.

Merry by nature, it still took David a long while to clear his mind of the images that Luke had roused. He knew how bad All Hallows Eve could be, and he didn't really want to be around for another one. But there was no other option, not that jumped into his mind, anyway. He finally fell asleep, but it was a restless, disturbed sleep. He dreamed of fire, this finally giving way to even more disturbing dreams. Reaching for

sunlight, suddenly blocked. Desperate for warmth, only to be trapped in an unending chill. Aching for laughter and surrounded by silence. The cooing and trilling of the pigeons was the last sound he heard, and the noise that woke him. One of the birds had landed on his head, and

was attempting to groom his hair. A violent shaking convinced the bird that barbering was best practiced elsewhere.

It seemed to be more wintry this morning. Hoping that the weather wasn't turning, David waited, shivering, for the sun. He tried to visualize. the Italian countryside: his dream world. Full of warmth, golden light, olive oil and pasta. Red wine, fine music and the artistry of his ancestors. Well, they were sort of his ancestors... He wanted to be there so badly that he could taste it.

"Do you drink coffee?" a familiar voice asked him. Sophie Tucker cradled a large mug between her palms, standing right in front of David. David breathed in the enticing aroma. He wasn't ever alert in the mornings. It was no wonder that he hadn't even noticed her standing there. She handed over the container, asking only if he had foot-in-mouth disease.

David smiled slightly before taking his first taste of the brew. It was rich and dark, sweet and strong. He liked it.

"You look uncomfortable." Sophie said, and began to dig through a bulging carrysack. Sifting through assorted piles, she set aside a heavy flannel shirt and some baggy trousers that matched.

"Here, put these on." she said, tossing them to him. Another new experience, and he'd only met her the day before. David felt as if new vistas were being opened to him, and he was thrilled. Dressing in warmth, he was amazed at the quickly spreading comfort.

"Thankyouthankyouthanlcyouthan!ryou " he chanted as one long word.

Sophie grinned. "anytime, friend."

David's muscles now cozy, felt loose and easy. He was beginning to feel alive again.

"Want to walk somewhere?" Sophie asked.

"You did say you wanted to talk..." she paused doubtfully. "Oh, wait. Can you?"

David nodded. "Yeah, now. I'm feeling better, but the thing is...I sort of promised someone that I wouldn't be obvious about moving around.

People like us are, um...not socially accepted, y'see? I said I'd be careful, so if it's okay...can we sit somewhere out of sight? Maybe in the maze?"

Sophie shrugged. "Fine with me. love. I don't mind at all. But tell your friend from me that I would no more do something to get you hurt than I would! to myself. Not all people are horrible, you know..." David stopped her by placing one hand over mouth. He grinned at her to take away any offence, and just began walking.

They sat in a patch of sunlight at the center of the Tudor-style maze, sheltered from the wind by the tall hedges. David found himself completely relaxed and comfortable enough to sit and speak of inconsequential.

Sophie took off her moth eaten beret, floppy and gray, and like the rest of her outfit from the previous day, supremely unflattering. Hair the dark brown of a tree's bark spilled over her back.

"Nice hair." David commented.

"Mmmmmm, thanks. My one beauty."

David looked at her considering. "Not true. Good skin, good hair, nice eyes, when they aren't all red, anyhow. You're not conventionally pretty, but why should you care if you look like someone else's standard of good looks?"

"You should talk." Sophie jibed.

David shrugged. "I was made this way. At least YOU are unique. Imagine what it's like to be a copy of someone else." He grinned at her. "But your clothes, Sophie. You have to do something about your clothes!!"

"Always fashion critics, everywhere I go," she groaned. "Just don't tell me to be more feminine...I'll have to get violent." She scowled fiercely, and David laughed at her.

"So just out of curiosity, you understand, why were you sitting at the feet of the Goddess of Love, on a very damp morn, talking to strangers after a serious bout of tears? Or is this just a hobby?"

Sophie glared at him.

"As it happens, it is a relaxation technique that my family therapist suggested to me to help relieve the stress in my life."

"You have a family therapist?"

"Hey, don't mock. I told you, theatre family. We are just stock full of artistic temperament,

my friend, and high strung to boot. So, yes, we've all had therapy, and we know a very good specialist who works with us as needed. Stop laughing, David..."

He couldn't help himself.

"Anyway," she continued, deciding to ignore his mirth. "I have already had a trying week, with my mother and my sisters trying to make me over and my father trying to insist that I become an actress, and me not feeling brave enough to talk to him about what I really want. Yes, David, I DO feel that way upon occasion...I don't WANT to act. I hate it. As far as the proposed makeover goes, would you let someone cut off your hair, dye whatever was left, paint your face and put you in uncomfortable clothing?"

David shook his head. "No. But then, no-one's ever tried. Not to change me, and not to make me act." He thought for a moment. "Can't you just tell them to leave you alone?"

She made a face. David realized that she had an extremely expressive and was adept at twisting it into many different looks, all gruesome.

"You don't know my family," she said. "I do tell them no. My father thinks that it's simply a matter of stagefright, and says that the only cure is to PERFORM, and that once I try it, all of the 'theatre' in my blood will come gushing forth, earning accolades for myself and my family." She sighed, dejectedly.

"What do you want to do?" David asked.

"I'm more at home with the technical aspects of theatre, especially wardrobe department. I like to work there, but my father just doesn't see the appeal. He says it isn't theatre if I'm not using my voice, my instrument, as he calls it. Anyway, I am usually too tired to fight with all of them at the same time...I know that I'm the baby but sometimes it gets a bit much. I want to be a member of the family, but I don't want to be the family itself."

David looked thoughtful, and tried to be encouraging. "But would you say you were happy? Really happy?"

"David, no-one's really happy. I'm content. Well, for the most part. There's things I really want to do, you know?...I'm nineteen years old, not ten. I want most of all to get to Italy..."

"Me, too." David interrupted her.

"No, really? That'd be tops, wouldn't it?" Sophie grinned at him. "Coo, just think what we'd do in Italy, David...At least you'd fit in. You look Italian."

David looked down at himself. Well, maybe. Sophie continued. "Anyway, what I was saying, is I've had an offer, see, to go and study at a theatre company, for wardrobe work. The folks who run it are mates with my family, and I'm sure my dad would support me...once he got over the idea that I didn't want to be in HIS theatre, anyway.

At least, I think he would." she sighed. She traced designs in the grass. "What is it about parents, anyhow?"

David kept his eyes on her hands. "Don't

I know. I don't think we have parents, as such."

Sophie squinted at him. "Then how did you get here?"

David shrugged. "Don't know," he said again. "Let me see if I can explain this at all." He thought for a moment. "Kay, here goes. We know that we were created, made. Something...artistic caused us to exist. Sometimes I think I remember a voice, or a feeling, but whether it's a true memory or not...who knows? Anyway, when one of us was able to fall in love with one of you, oh, years and, years ago, things changed. for us. Since then, we've kind of been able to be like you. We're alive, and we move and breathe...sort of, and we think and feel, but the rest of it, like eating and drinking, wearing clothes, all of that...as near as I can figure out, it's strictly optional. If we choose to do so, to adapt and become even more like you, the changes we take on last. So from that point forward, we'd get hungry and thirsty and things like that. Which means that you are honor bound now to keep me supplied with coffee..."

Sophie laughed. "But, can you ever leave the park? Have you ever tried?"

David shook his head. "The older ones, they don't like it when I even talk to you. I can understand their concerns, considering the types we see in here sometimes, especially at night, but it seems to me that if a person is bad, they'll be bad no matter what race, age or whatever they are. So if I'm careful, and watch what I say, and to whom, I should come out fine."

Sophie frowned. "Have you ever been attacked in here?" she asked angrily.

"No. Well, not so's you'd notice, really. All Hallow's Eve is usually rather grim, and gets a bit hairy. One year my friend Vee had both arms broken, but Luke was able to fix her, he's kind of the doctor, let me see, what else...Lorelei has been cut before, and someone took off a piece of her, uh, tail...well, it hurt her anyway. I've been sprayed with paint before, and THAT tools forever to clean off, let me tell you..."

"What, don't they have any security in here?"

"It isn't that, Sophie. There's nothing that needs protecting in here, at least to the minds of the authorities; and in a sense, they're right. We can protect ourselves, if we choose to do so. It's just that most of the others, well, they won't. They won't defend themselves. I'd like to think that I would, if truly threatened, but I know that they won't. And that's just plain daft, to me."

Sophie looked alarmed. "David, be careful. I mean, I have NO doubt that you can defend yourself, you're pretty big after all, but if someone comes against you with a weapon, a pipe or something, you could be seriously damaged, and you'd be in a pretty fragile situation...Promise me you'll thin; before you act."

David just looked at her. "You, too?" he asked. "Luke is forever telling me to be careful. Do I need to hear this from you, too?"

She laid one hand along his arm. "Don't get upset. Just think, you have to be in good

enough shape to come to Italy with me."

"When are you supposed to go?"

"The course starts in a few weeks. So I guess I should talk to my dad, hey?" She bit her lip. "Maybe."

David took a deep breath. The air smelled good. That had to be the result of his good mood. The air in London NEVER smelled good. Sophie lay on her back; in the grass.

"How long have you been here?" she asked him curiously.

David thought. "Well, I remember the Eighties and some of the Seventies. I remember the clothes and the music, so I know I was around long enough for it to make an impression on me. I'd guess around sixteen years. But it's difficult to say, really, when you don't age. Or at least you

don't keep records of aging. The way I see it, in your terms, we are right about the same age, or close enough so's it doesn't matter."

They sat quietly for a moment, listening to the traffic bustle.

"What do you do all day?" she asked again.

"I told you, I listen. Conversations, arguments, philosophies, entertainment, and I try to learn as much as I can. That's about it, really. I watch

people, and every once in a while, I talk to someone. What about you? I bet your life is pretty unusual." Sophie shook her head. "Despite what you may have heard, about theatre people, they are just as strict with their kids as other parents. At least, mine were. Are. My typical day is begun by getting up too early, going to work at the theatre, arguing with my dad about ACTING and avoiding my mother and whoever she thinks I should; go out with; I get to spend about half my time doing whatever I want to, simply because I've nagged my father for the last three years to let me do so." She looked smugly at David. "So I spend most of the -free time with wardrobe people, learning whatever I can, and watching fashion stuff for ideas. I wander the streets of town quite a bit." She shrugged. "That's about it."

David had been piecing together fragments of information.

"Are you rich, Sophie?" he asked, incredulously.

Sophie began to nod, then thought better of it. "Well, say I'm comfortable. The family is quite good at what they do, and Mum's always been a good business manager to boot. She taught us all how to handle money properly, and how -to balance our chequebooks, not that I don't prefer to spend mine, but we've all learned how to invest and save. Then, when we were small, the family set us up with trust funds for our chosen educations. So, yeah, I guess you could say we do pretty well for ourselves."

"Do your older brothers and sisters go to college?"

She shook her head. "No. The funds are done in such a way as to be used for the education of our choice. So when they decided to go into the arts, the money was accessible even though

it wasn't for college."

David nodded. "Are they all actors?"

"NO, no. Mick writes plays, and Lee's a director...but I tried that argument on my dad and he pointed that both of them had at least tried acting, which is more than I've done. But I'm not willing to do any more than I've done already, you know, simple stuff. I just don't want to."

"Sophie, why don't you just talk to your father honestly? You obviously love your family, and it sounds like your dad's a good man, you h-know...he did provide you with a therapist and all..."

Sophie hit him.

"Anyway," he continued "...I haven't even known you more than twenty-four hours, and I see that when you've made up your mind to do something it happens. No doubt about it. You will be in wardrobe, and probably win awards for it, and there's not a thing that your dad will do that will change that. So make the best of it...talk to him, tell him about Italy, and give him some time to adjust his dreams accordingly."

Sophie listened intently.

"You're right. You are." She sat up suddenly.

"In fact, I'll talk him into loving the idea. Today. Right now." She looked at David. "If I promise to come again tomorrow and fill you in on all of the details, do you mind if I go?"

David was surprised. She was going to do it now? Immediately? No other lagging or excuses? What else could he do but agree? He nodded, and Sophie leaned forward and kissed his cheek.

"You could come with me," she suggested, "- - if you wanted to meet the family..."

"And how would you explain ME?" he asked her pointedly.

She shrugged. "I'd find a way."

David began to laugh. "D'y'know, I haven't got any doubt of that? I have never met anyone like you, Sophie Tucker. I never expected to meet anyone like you."

She laughed back at him. "Well, I've certainly Never met anyone like YOU!" She got up, dusted herself off, and held one hand out to David.

"Do you think the world will change you, David?" She asked. He thought carefully before answering. "I'd like to think that no, or that the changes would all be positive ones, but it'd be silly to say at this point in my life that I'll stay the same way forever." They walked around to the pathway, wandering between the hedges. "What about you?"

"I think that I was born around thirty," Sophie said. "And all of my life up to this point I've been precocious, working up to my true age. After that point, I age no more. I'll be in my chosen niche, in the career I want, in Italy, and my life will be full of people who care about me and who want to talk to me." She stopped short, and looked at him. "You will come with me, won't you?"

David hugged her playfully. "Why, of course I will. If I can."

They parted ways, Sophie off to talk to her family, and David off to enjoy more of the autumn sunshine.

Luke, unseen by either of them, watched with a thoughtful look on his face.

As night fell, David could almost hear Sophie explaining her vision of the future to her parents and various siblings. He really didn't harbor any doubts as to the outcome. She would get her way, and be in Italy in a few weeks. He envied that in her, that part of her that was so unhesitating, so confident once she had made her mind up about something. She had certainly accepted him quickly. And it seemed that they'd always known each other, they were so much alike in so many ways. He wished that he had some of her confidence, though. He wanted so desperately to change, and yet all he ever did was dream...

He had to talk to Luke. Luke would know.

"Of course it's possible, David," Luke said.

"It just happens to be the most insane thing you have ever suggested. This goes way beyond unwise conversations, even further than trying to make friends with those who will never be your equal, let alone your superior, despite what they think of themselves..."

"Has it been done before, or is it just theory?"

"It has been done before, by some naive...However, you need help to do it, someone to help when it gets painful, and who acts like a sponsor. It's also irrevocable, David. That means that you will never be the same again." He paused, looking almost angry. "Why are you even contemplating this, David? You won't get any help from me, or from the others, not in suicide. That's what it would amount to, you know? Killing yourself."

"Luke, can't you see? I'm different. I always have been, and you know it. Be more careful, David. Don't talk to them, David. Stand still, David. Better to be safe than sorry, David. I'm sorry, Luke, but you know as well as I do, if I really want help, I'll get it. This is my choice and I want..."

"YOU want? YOU? You, my friend, are still a child compared to the rest of us. You can't last in their world and if you had the sense you were born with, you'd realize it." Luke had begun to shout, truly angry now.

"Take a good look at yourself, David. You're dressed as one of them, you speak like one of them, you are acting like one of them more and more every minute. Can't you see what you are doing to yourself? I saw you today, David. I saw you drink the stuff that friend of yours gave you, and you know what that means, don't you? It means that from now on you are susceptible to thirst and you're weak. Food's next, and then you'll need to eat to survive, and more and more insanity until you are as fragile as they are. You

won't be able to live here, for one thing. Have you thought about that, David? You have no job no skills, no money, nothing that you will need to make it in their world...and you will die, David. Are you familiar with that concept, David, Are YOU?"

David threw up his hands. "YES!" he shouted back. "I am familiar with that concept, but why can't you see that if I just stop now, if I can't learn anymore, if I can't DO or TALK anymore, I will just as surely die?? Maybe not in the traditional sense, but I'll be stagnant, stale and unhappy. And as near as I can tell, a slow, lonely, miserable death is much, much worse than a quick ending experienced while living the way

I want to live, while doing something that I could love."

"You have completely lost your mind." Luke said stiffly.

"No, Luke. I haven't. I've only learned to use to one I have."

The two of them stared at each other, both breathing harshly, neither one willing to give up yet.

"I know that it's possible, Luke. I KNOW it can be done. I WILL find a way, and someone WILL help me. You know it, and I know it. I would rather it was you, someone I trusted, but if not..."

"Don't even threaten me, boy. I taught you everything you know. If you even think-: that you can scare me..."

"I have scared you, Luke. You wouldn't be this upset if you weren't frightened. Of what, who can say? I don't believe that you're only worried about me, I think you're scared for yourself." Luke shook his head. "You don't know..."

"What I'm talking about? Oh, really? Think of this, Luke. While you were so busy teaching me everything I know, I was learning. Watching,

watching YOU, Luke. But you aren't the person I knew then, not the one I always thought you were. You don't want me to be like them, you treat them like they were our enemy, but you know as well as I do that they are just like us: an even split between good and bad. I know better than to become involved with the bad ones. You taught me honor, and I will be honorable. I want to live like the artists of the Renaissance, full of life and laughter...I want to live like Michelangelo, Luke...It doesn't mean that I feel less a part of things here, really it doesn't. But I am more like them than I am like you, Luke. This is my future, and I wish you'd help me meet it."

David was having a hard time breathing steadily, and he sat abruptly down on the sidewalk. Luke looked concernedly at him, and knelt opposite him.

"It's irrevocable, David" he said so quietly that David almost missed it. "But it can't be stopped now..."

"What?..."

It felt as if a thousand stinging insects had landed on David, and were busily employed making him as miserable as possible. He was on fire, sweating uncontrollably and starting to shake.

"What d'you mean, Luke?...what you mean, tell me..." David stuttered. He couldn't speak properly, his tongue swollen and every part of him exploding in newly felt sensations.

"I'm trying to, David...hold still...it's already started. You've made up your mind with no hesitation, that's -the first step. You've already adopted some of their habits, that's second. Hold still, Vee will help..."

David suddenly realized that the others were there, had been there, silent witnesses to what was happening. Vee came forward, taking the sweat soaked shirt Luke handed to her, and began rubbing the cloth over David's chalk white skin. Flakes peeled away at the touch.

Luke continued, as David's teeth chattered. He was so cold now that he thought for sure that he'd shatter from it.

"This isn't something we take lightly, David. We had to be absolutely sure that you knew all of the bad details as well as the good before this could happen. Under ideal circumstances, this is wrenching, and extremely painful...you would still do it if you'd known, wouldn't you?"

"Y-y-yessss"

Luke nodded. "Thought so." He was rubbing hard on David's feet. "I heard what Sophie said, about going to Italy, and yes, in case you need to know, I was spying on you. You won't look out for yourself, someone else had to...I think your friend Sophie will do just fine. Anyone hurts you, and God help them...Careful, David you are about to feel very, very bad..."

David groaned. "I feel very, very bad...already...Luke"

Luke had the nerve to laugh. "That's what you get, David." The tingling in David's limbs had become a comfortable sensitivity, an awareness of skin and bone.

"You have circulation, David." Vee murmured behind him. She was performing the same massage technique that Luke used, only on David's back and shoulders.

"You just had to do this in late fall, didn't you? Damn cold, isn't it?"

"Shut up, Luke."

David seemed to have passed through the worst of the ordeal. The cramps were easing, the nausea was gone and the torment in his skin was

over. He lay on his side, and looked up at his friends. They all returned his gaze, watching him curiously.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked, holding his breath.

"You're just as ugly" Luke snorted. David relaxed.

"I think; I'll just lie here for a while, assuming that I'm not needed for anything?"

Luke shook his head. "Rest there." he said, "We'll get you some clothes." In the meantime,

he draped an old blanket over David, so much more exposed to the elements now.

"Luke?" David asked, exhausted.

"Yes?"

"Thank you."

Early the next morning, Sophie Tucker came striding down the hedgepath carrying two huge cups of coffee and wearing a huge grin. She turned the corner where the path split and stopped dead in front of where David normally stood.

There was nothing there except a pile of rubble. A hazy white dust still floated lazily around the space, and the debris spread in a large loose hillock. No sign of her friend.

Sophie's eyes widened, disbelieving.

"What?...Where?...Oh, my God...David?...David?...Oh, my God?"

She wheeled around, beginning to feel panicked. The morning was misty, as usual, and she nearly walked into the solid shape before she saw it. Sophie realized instantly that she was alone in a deserted park with a large and strong-looking man silently facing her. And both her hands were full.

"Full of hot coffee, ninny..." she thought savagely at herself, preparing to throw. Before she could act however, a voice stopped her.

"Don't waste the coffee, Sophie. It's me."

Sophie rocked back on her heels, and stared in shock at the man before her.

"No, it can't be...David?"

He grinned, reaching for one of the coffees, which she held away from him, suddenly annoyed.

"I was worried about you!" she told him, indignant. "I saw that rubble, and I thought something had happened to you, and you scared me just now, I would have thrown the coffee at you, and now, you'd be hurt hey? Now, you want to drink the coffee, do you? Not until I get an explanation, mate. Understand"

David laughed at her. He felt freer than he'd dreamed possible.

"I had hoped to beat you here, and just wait for you, that way you wouldn't worry, but you'd probably still have been unnerved...obviously this all happened last night after you left, But we didn't find clothes until this morning, and it IS still early, you know..."

"Excuses, excuses...here. Drink fast, I want details." She stared at him, absorbing his new look. Thick dark hair, waving deeply. Olive skin, sculpted bones, and a striking profile. He was very Italian, and very good-looking. He watched her, and grinned irrepressibly.

"You had better NEVER say another word about my wardrobe." she chided him. "Where did you get THAT?"

He was wearing something old and ill-fitting.

"I told you, we found it. Seemed to be clean, and it didn't smell. I figured I'd go shopping fairly soon..."

"Definitely.. We are Definitely going shopping before you meet Mum."

She shook her head. "I just can't believe it..."

"I was there, and believe me it happened."

Hurt like hell, too, but it was...is definitely worth it." he offered in explanation.

"So now I have to introduce my performance artist friend to my family, the one who's going to Italy with me, but I have to explain why he's so bloody good looking and why they've never met him before..."

"Performance artist?"

Sophie shot him a look full of wicked glee. "Had to figure out something to explain why you spent so much of your time in a park."

David started to laugh, and she joined him. Giggling like children, their faces were damp with tears before they quieted.

"What happens now?" David asked, looking around them.

"Hmmm... Well, since I am apparently somewhat responsible for you now, I suppose I'll have to feed you something and take you clothes shopping so you won't frighten little old ladies, and then you get to meet the family...and then, ummm, how about going to theatre school in Italy?"

"WHAT??"

Sophie's eyes danced. "You weren't the only one to have something interesting happen last night, you know. I spoke to my family, and do you know this whole pushing me to act has been a set-up? They knew all about Italy, and approved, but the deal was that I had to ask for it. So my dad is happy, and I took advantage of it and asked him to sponsor my poor, down on his luck friend who was very talented. hut need a break. He wants to meet you, and I hope you impress him, because if you do, he'll sponsor you to school with me. In the country of Italy."

She skipped around David, standing dumbfounded. "What do you think? I think you had better be very nice to me, David."

He nodded, unable to speak for a moment. His mouth worked, but no sound emerged. Finally, he croaked the words he wanted to say.

"Thank you. I really, really thank you Sophie. None of this would have happened but for you."

Sophie shushed him. "Yes, it would've. Maybe later, but it would have happened."

"Yes, well..." David began again, and Sophie tackled him, tickling him madly until he yelped.

"Just think," Sophie told him happily, "I can do almost anything to you, and tell you it's supposed to be fun, and you'll have no way of knowing otherwise..."

She tucked her arm through his, and they walked to the front of the path, retracing her steps. David looked around him, taking it all in one last time. Passing through the artistically antiqued barrier, proclaiming the legend "Opened 1970", they glanced at the modern map posted there.

"Did you want to say goodbye?" Sophie asked.

"I said everything last night, to everyone who needed to know." He looked down at her. "By the way, Luke says you're welcome to visit with me anytime. He said he'd do something for

me at the gate...I wonder what?"

"Here, David. Look at this." Sophie was pointing to the map. On the sign identifying the Modern Classics Sculpture Garden, below the list of pieces situated within, someone had altered the notice. The Thinker was still there, as was the Lorelei, Venus de Mile, and: St. Luke the Physician. But through the last name on the list a thick Black line had been drawn, crossing out the word "David". "Yes, well..." David began again, and Sophie tackled him, tickling him madly until he yelped.

Kit Knowles

SENSITIVITY

sensitivity is a rare commodity
like diamonds, you don't flaunt
it in public
for fear of an attack
a burglary of your soul,
you wear your fakes
your zirconia
and people think they're getting
the real item
instead of an imitation.

Ellen jJ Davis

NOMELITON

I'm going to live where it's always cold
and the chocolate milk tastes bad.
The people there will be unfriendly and
never, ever fall in love

And they won't lie to you
and they won't see thru you
because they never even think to care,
and they won't take checks
and they don't like sex
and Melissa isn't there.

I'm gonna move to a backwards state
where the highway signs say where you've been
and nobody reads the obituaries
because the townsfolk are pretty much dead

And nobody's painting
'cause it's always raining
and the children never share
their toys with their brother
'cause they hate each other
and Melissa's never there.

I'll build me a house on the railroad tracks
and my job'll be to open up
the front door and the back door
when the 9:09 comes thru

And there can't be a wedding
'cause everyone's betting
that the minister hasn't a prayer,
and the groom is missing
'cause he's busy kissing
Melissa who isn't there

zen sutherland

ENSLAVED

WHERE AM I LED IN THIS SORROWFUL PLAGUE?
OF A STRANGER
A MYSTERY MAN
GRIPPING EVERY NERVE I'M MADE OF
STRINGING ME ALONG HIS CHAIN

HIS MASTER PLAN TO CAPTURE
SOME SALVE OF MY INSANITY
AND ANOINT THE EGO BED
OF HIS STAGE

YES, ME AS MATERIAL A FINE DISPLAY TO EVOKE
HIS TEDIOUSLY BALANCED EROTIC CHAIR
WHICH CUSHIONS UNDER WRATH & UPHOLDS HIS ASS
WHEN SHOT BY CUPID'S FLAIR
IN INNOCENCE I PLAY ON LEFT
MY PASSIVE BACK AFLOAT
IN SOFT AND SHIMMERING
DANGER WAVES
I HALF EXPECT TO EXPLODE
WHILE I'M ALONE
ALONE
(YET ON PORTRAIT IN HIS SELFISH PRAISE)

FOR USE IN HIS GAME
I'M SHAMED

DANÉA CORRINE LEIGH





A Different I

I returned, a stranger to my hometown

I've grown out of it

I'm out of step

I no longer belong

I'm city now

I see things with a different I

I question the rutted roads

The dirt and denim

The garish, blue-painted houses

The smoke-belching rusty cars

Old friends don't seem to notice

They see things with a different eye

The grand house in which I grew up
looks small and paint-bare, country-poor

More shingles lay scattered around the ground

Than on the rotting, sagging roof

The house looks uninhabitable to me, but

The people living there see it

with a different eye

Time's eroded all the mountains
of my memories

Muddied the rivers, belched soot into the sky

Sown weeds in my garden,

broken the window of my old

curtain flutters good-bye as I drive away, but

It's hard to see it with a tear in my I

Piane Posch

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth hour

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth hour
the sun made crimson the ocean's skin
then, to the deep the tide bent lower
and to such depth my feelings pinned.
Between the scarlet bringing forth dusk
you were there with me my dearest jewel
my dearest Love, my strongest lust,
bringing my life a sweet renewal.

In a gondola, I saw us sitting
soon after, then, you held me close,
for such imaginings the scene was fitting
two loves inside one darkling rose.
As we embraced, the eve' grew old
bit it will hence be turned to gold.

Anna Delgado





Creation

I am the Nothing; a darkness, nowhere.

I wonder if all else is an empty as I.

I hear silence; deadly, and become numb.

I see darkness, eternal midnight.

I want to be something, to be alive.

I am the nothing; a vacuum, in space

I pretend there is no God.

I feel empty inside.

I touch a man named Jesus, whose love reaches out.

I worry, for I don't know how to love.

I cry, for I know I am not all I can be.

I am nothing; a dark, empty soul.

I understand I've sinned.

I say I'm sorry, and ask forgiveness.

I dream of the future, a perfect Heaven.

I try to tell my friends, but I am shunned.

I hope my light is bright and shows others.

I am Something; a candle, shining in the night.

Daniel C. Thiernann

I burn like fire in Cairo

Deep dark city of wounds and narrow ditch mind
Leaked strips into scam of brink, mortality starved
Unrestored pipes of mentality, barred from sanity
Restless and scarce are the more between solid lines

I search i search, pulled by the cocks of control
shaking them off like dirty water
their souls from the dusk of mythology
still servants, dampened by their pharoic dungeons

Barred and slit into modern cages
slippery yet stuck
in a double world
a black burning mirror

Heated and dank, silted, sanded, rank and rotten
Deteriorating, loss of plot, scooping their pockets
Into the last fold for the smoke
The stream of ash and emotion
that gushes out with breath
Mingled about the lowest haze
of humans maze on earth

the Nile quietly sifts by, contained in its mystery
cooling shores of molten scores
of creatures within its girth
a sweet flow, a green onto judgement
of masses

Who are unknown, delirious
Kindled in The Surprise of Reality

The flames will die when no more wood ignites them
when the only source of spirit is addiction
A slow painful death with a brilliant streak
And a black hole with razor sharp sides to slice
and divide a whole into pieces, shred life into rivers
of blood, semen

Wasted seed, spent haphazardly at The mosque
Where no woman dare tread to visit his God

Egypt, Egypt you cruel beautiful place
Your dazzling fire devours me
and burns my double face

Danée Corrine Leigh





Mother's Arms

Thunder explodes as lightening rips the sky
The night calm is shattered

There is a rushing pitter-patter from the hallway
I look up from my book to see you
Stumble around the corner
with your worn yellow blanket

You scurry frantically into my lap

We settle deep into grandmother's rocking chair
To quiet your trembling
It's been such a long time

The floorboards creak
In rhythm to the rocking
Wispy hair brushes light against my cheek
Still so soft

Warm and curled in a tight yellow ball
Your nestle like a kitten
Beneath the shield of your blanket
In the fortress of my lap

Safe from the storm outside
There is a pang in my chest
A familiar hollow ache

For now I must forget
That time will soon grow your legs too long
And your mind too wise
To seek refuge in your mother's arms
Beneath a tattered remnant of cloth

Lorri Barefoot

A Long Night's Work

The quiet sill of night covers the land. Away on a distant hilltop a lone tree stands, but on this cool night the stillness is broken by the movement of a creature that builds to live and lives to build.

Masterpieces as great as Leonardo's are created night by night just to be blown down by powerful winds or washed away by the purifying rain. Perhaps its fate is sealed, but this creature has a job to do and after it is done will do another.

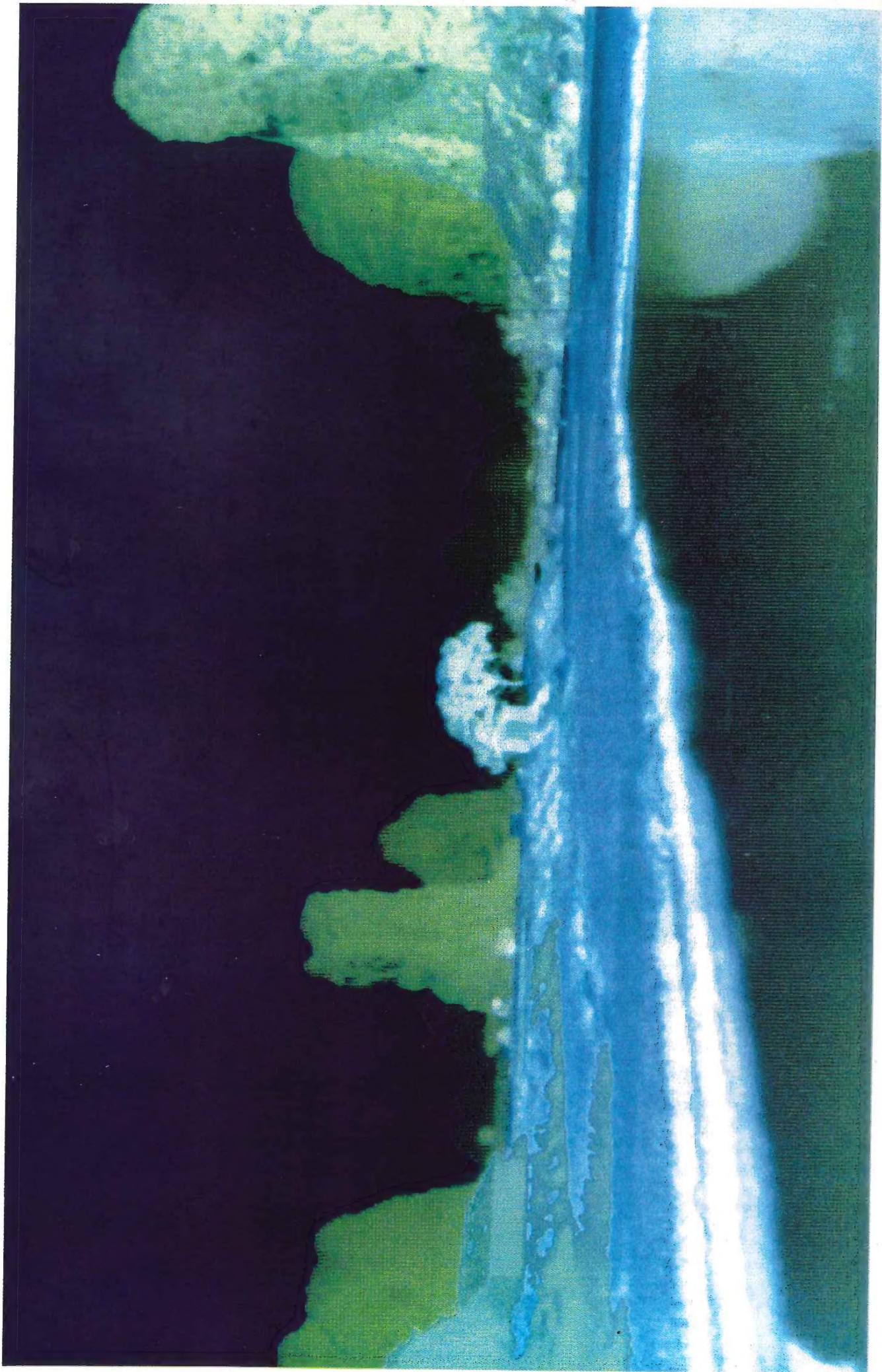
The shuffling artist goes to work swinging from branch to branch like a maypole's strings. Painstakingly searching for a perfect place in which its monument will stand.

Feverishly, it goes to work looking as though it has no care for time, but on the contrary, the second hand of dawn swells on its brow like a white, hot chain.

Madly welding its tools of trade, yet not a drop of paint flushes a canvass nor an ounce of clay spatter a wheel. Instead silvery threads, forged in the bowls of its soul, intertwine like capillaries.

At dawn, the night's work is covered by silver coins of the realm, that shimmer and sparkle in the early morning light. Its work done, its purpose completed, this Rumpelstiltskin of nature leaves its temporary sanctuary and scurries away, leaving its work to the brutal criticism of nature.

Darius C. Engel
second place poetry contest



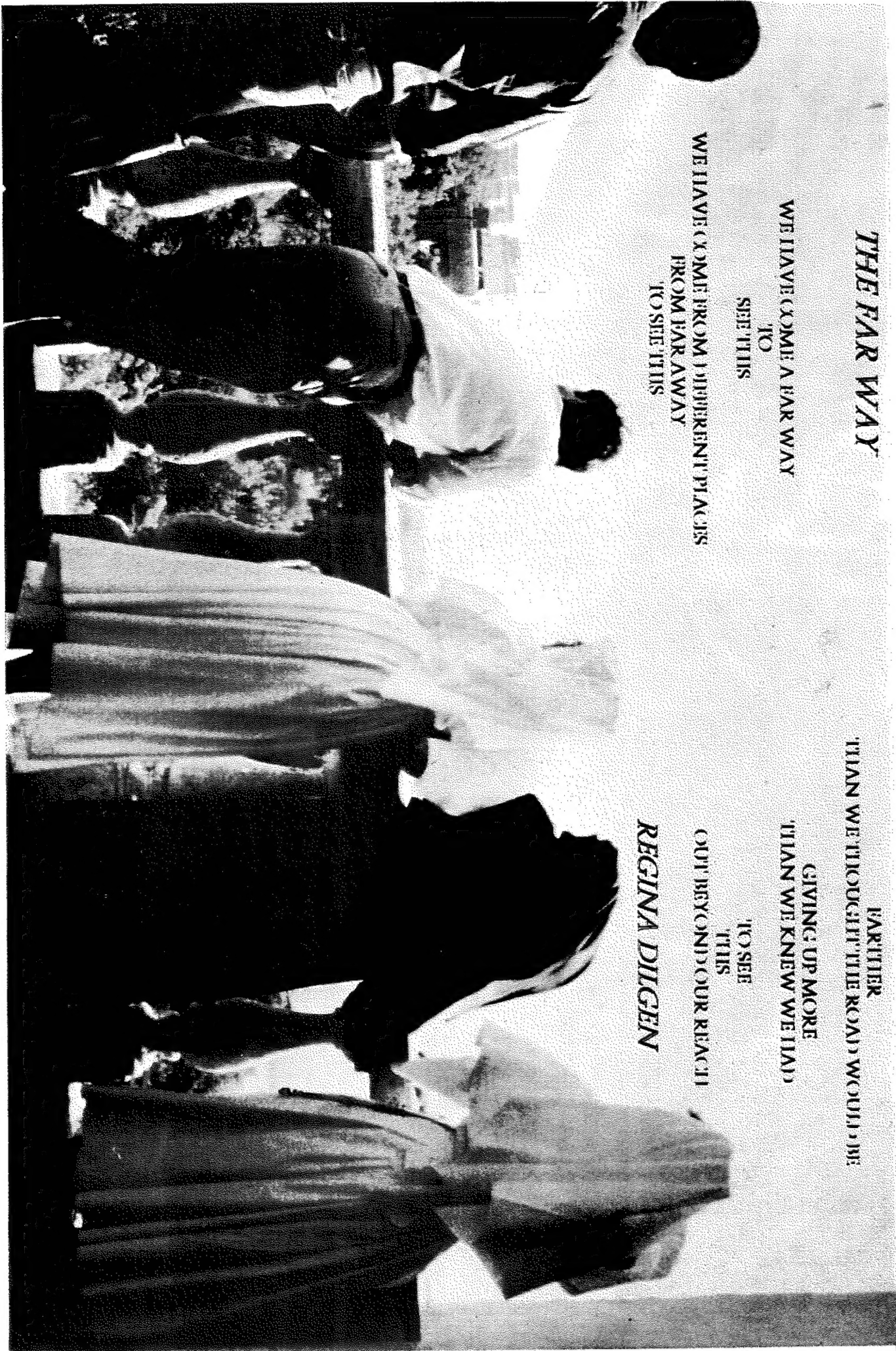
THE FAR WAY

WE HAVE COME A FAR WAY
TO
SEE THIS
WE HAVE COME FROM DIFFERENT PLACES
FROM FAR AWAY
TO SEE THIS

FARTHIER
THAN WE THOUGHT THE ROAD WOULD BE

GIVING UP MORE
THAN WE KNEW WE HAD
TO SEE
THIS
OUT BEYOND OUR REACH

REGINA DILGEN



RAIN

CURSE NOT THE RAIN
THAT PLUMENS SWEET CHERRIES
AND DRESSES THE WORLD
IN MIRRORS

WATER OF LIFE...
PRIMORDIAL SOUP-BASE,
WITH SCALLIONS AND BASIL-
OUR TEARS.

KEN DUNCAN

